



Quick Stats on Female Adolescents

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

- From 1975-96, the rate of marijuana use among eighth-grade girls tripled. In 1991, 6.2 percent of eighth-grade girls reported using marijuana in the past 12 months. In 1996, 18.3 percent reported the same. In 1997, that rate went down to 16.1 percent and was further reduced to 15.3 percent in 1998. (Johnston, L. D., O'Malley, P., and Bachman, J. 1998. The National Survey Results on Drug Use from Monitoring the Future Study, 1975-1997. Rockville, MD: National Institute on Drug Abuse.[NIDA])
- Adolescent girls and boys are now equally likely to drink or use illicit drugs. (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. 1996. Substance Abuse and the American Woman. New York, NY: Available online www.casacolumbia.org/publications1456/publications.htm. [CASA])
- Today's girls are 15 times more likely than their mothers to have begun using illicit drugs by age 15. (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. 1996. Substance Abuse and the American Woman. New York, NY: Available online www.casacolumbia.org/publications1456/publications.htm. [CASA])
- Since 1991, anabolic steroid use by teenage girls has approximately doubled, whereas steroid use by teenage boys is nearly unchanged. (Monitoring the Future, 1998. [MTF])



TOBACCO

- Girls are now equally or more likely than boys to smoke, depending on age. (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. 1996. Substance Abuse and the American Woman. New York, NY: Available online www.casacolumbia.org/publications1456/publications.htm. [CASA])
- Nearly 20 percent of eighth-grade girls reported using cigarettes within the past 30 days. (Monitoring the Future, 1998. [MTF])
- Stress and depression are related to smoking for girls. Two-thirds of girls who say they smoke several cigarettes or more per week say they do so to relieve stress. Girls with depressive symptoms are more than twice as likely to smoke (23 percent) as girls with low or no depressive symptoms (11 percent). (Commonwealth Fund. 1997. The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Girls. Conducted by Louis Harris and Associates. [CFS])
- The initiation of smoking in girls is associated with attaining desired self-image, feelings of maturity, independence, sexuality, health, and sociability. Frequent dieting is also found to increase the likelihood of smoking for girls in grades 7 through 12. (French, S. A. and Perry, C. L. 1996. "Smoking among adolescent girls: Prevalence and etiology." *Journal of the American Medical Women's Association*, 51 (1 & 2): 25-28. [AMWA])



SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

- More than 6 percent (6.5 percent) of ninth-grade girls first had sexual intercourse before age 13. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 1997. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System Summary. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service)
- Alcohol use in adolescents is a strong predictor of both sexual activity and unprotected sex. Teenage girls who drink are more likely to have sex and have it without a condom than girls who do not drink alcohol. This reduced inhibition can lead to unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS and gonorrhea. (Ibid.)
- Like alcohol, marijuana heightens the likelihood of unprotected sex. Teenage girls who have used marijuana at least 3 times in the past month are more than twice as likely to be sexually active and 25 percent less likely to use condoms than those who have never used marijuana. (Ibid.)

- The percentage of 15- to 19-year-old girls who have had sex declined from 62 percent in 1991 to 51 percent in 1998. (CDC's National Center for Health Statistics. 1999. *Get Organized: A Guide to Prevent Teen Pregnancy*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service. [PTP])
- The overall U.S. teenage pregnancy rate declined 17 percent between 1990 and 1996, from 117 pregnancies per 1,000 women age 15 to 19 to 97 pregnancies per 1,000 women age 15 to 19. (Alan Guttmacher Institute. 1999. *Teenage Pregnancy: overall trends and state-by-state information*. New York, NY: Alan Guttmacher Institute. [TP])
- Even though the teen pregnancy rate in the United States is declining, it is still the highest rate for teen pregnancies in the industrialized world. Furthermore, the 1998 National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy report shows that 78 percent of U.S. teen births occur to unwed mothers. (National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. 1998. *Whatever Happened To Childhood? The Problem of Teen Pregnancy in the United States*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. [NCPTP])
- In the United States each year, 11 percent of women ages 15 to 19 become pregnant at least once before the age of 20. This rate is nearly twice as high as that of Great Britain or Canada. (National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. 1998. *Whatever Happened To Childhood? The Problem of Teen Pregnancy in the United States*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. [NCPTP])

SUICIDE AND DEPRESSION

- Although the majority of adolescent girls are healthy and show signs of strong mental health, 1 in 4 girls exhibits depressive symptoms—a rate 50 percent higher than that for boys. Girls who exhibited symptoms of poor mental health also indicated that they often lacked a source of support during times when they felt great stress or depression. (Commonwealth Fund. 1997. *The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Girls*. Conducted by Louis Harris and Associates. [CFS])
- Adolescent girls report alarmingly high rates of thinking about suicide. Among high school girls, 1 in 3 had thought about suicide in the past 2 weeks, and another 3 percent responded positively to the statement, "I want to kill myself." (Ibid.)
- Girls who have been abused display more than twice the number of symptoms of poor mental health as girls who have not been abused. (Ibid.)

- Self-confidence declines with age for girls, but not for boys. Based on 10 statements about their feelings of self-worth, only 39 percent of high school girls (grades 9 to 12) were highly self-confident compared with 44 percent of younger girls (grades 5 to 8). In contrast, self-confidence improved with age among boys, with more than half (55 percent) indicating they were highly confident by high school. (Ibid.)
- Evidence indicates that increases in depressive disorders and mood swings are greater for girls than for boys during adolescence. By ages 14 to 15, girls are twice as likely as boys to suffer from depression, a gender difference that persists into adulthood. (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. 1995. *Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Corporation of New York.)



VIOLENCE AND CHILD ABUSE

- One in five high school girls reports that she has been physically or sexually abused. Younger girls (grades 5 through 8) also report significant rates of abuse: 7 percent say they have been sexually abused and 9 percent say they have been physically abused. (Commonwealth Fund. 1997. *The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Girls*. Conducted by Louis Harris and Associates. [CFS])
- Among ninth-grade students, 10.9 percent of girls say they carried a weapon (e.g., gun, knife, or club) in the previous month, compared with 33.2 percent of boys. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 1997. *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System Summary*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service)
- Younger girls were more likely than older girls to report threats or injuries with a weapon on school property in the past year (6.1 percent and 5.2 percent in the ninth and tenth grades, respectively, versus 2.3 percent and 2.5 percent in the eleventh and twelfth grades, respectively). At all grade levels, however, boys reported threats or injuries with a weapon about twice as often as did girls. (Ibid.)

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- Participation in sports can have a profound effect on the delay of girls' sexual activity. Studies have found that teen female athletes have their first intercourse later in adolescence than do nonathletes. Teen female athletes were also more likely to be virgins; 54 percent of female athletes said that they had never had sex, compared with 41 percent of nonathletes. Female athletes were also less than half as likely to get pregnant as nonathletes (5 percent and 11 percent, respectively.) (The Women's Sports Foundation. 1998. The Women's Sports Foundation Report on Sport and Teen Pregnancy-Executive Summary. New York, NY: Women's Sports Foundation.)
- The physical, emotional, and social benefits of physical activity are plentiful. Regular physical activity in adolescence can reduce girls' risk for obesity and help them build greater peak bone mass. It is also an effective tool for reducing the symptoms of stress and depression. Exercise and participation in sports can enhance mental health by increasing girls' positive feelings about body image, improving their self-esteem, and offering them tangible experiences of competency and success. (President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. 1997. Physical Activity and Sport in the Lives of Girls: Physical and Mental Health Dimensions from an Interdisciplinary Approach. Minneapolis, MN: The Center for Research on Girls and Women in Sports.)
- Although girls overwhelmingly indicate that they know exercise is important to health, by the time they reach high school, only 67 percent of girls exercise 3 times a week or more, compared with 80 percent of boys. Fifteen percent of high school girls say they exercise less than once or twice a week, or never. (Commonwealth Fund. 1997. The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Girls. Conducted by Louis Harris and Associates. [CFS])
- Participation in vigorous physical activity declines beginning in early adolescence: 61.6 percent of ninth-grade girls are vigorously active, compared with only 42.4 percent of twelfth-grade girls. At all grade levels, girls are significantly less active than boys. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 1997. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System Summary. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service)



NUTRITION AND BODY IMAGE

- Between the ages of 11 to 24, both males and females need to consume a calcium-rich diet-1,200 mg per day-in order to ensure adequate calcium deposition in their bones and reduce the incidence of osteoporosis in later years. However, girls and young women ages 12 to 19 were found to consume only 777 mg of calcium daily. Intake by boys and young men in the same age group was 1,176 mg. (Farley, D. 1997. "Bone builders: Support your bones with healthy habits." FDA Consumer. (September-October) Washington, DC: Available on-line: www.fda.gov/fdac/features/1997/697_bone.html.)
- Over 60 percent (60.5 percent) of ninth-grade girls report attempting to lose weight in the previous month compared to 23 percent of ninth-grade boys. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 1997. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System Summary. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service)
- Female high school students (8.7 percent) are significantly more likely than male high school students (1.9 percent) to have taken diet pills to lose weight. (Ibid.)
- Girls are at particular risk for eating disorders. One in 6 girls in grades 5 through 12 said she had binged on food and purged; 7 percent said they had done so more than once a week. (Commonwealth Fund. 1997. The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Girls. Conducted by Louis Harris and Associates. [CFS])

